



COLLEGE OF  
ALBERTA  
PSYCHOLOGISTS

**STANDARDS OF PRACTICE (2013)**

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The *Health Professions Act* (HPA) authorizes and requires the College of Alberta Psychologists' Council to adopt *Standards of Practice* for the profession. The *Standards of Practice* of the College of Alberta Psychologists are the minimum standards of professional behaviour and ethical conduct expected of all regulated members. The *Standards of Practice* address the process of the professional relationship and set the boundaries within which this relationship should occur. The Standards do not speak to, determine or dictate professional judgment. A breach of the *Standards of Practice* may constitute unprofessional conduct enforceable under the HPA. The College of Alberta Psychologists (the "College") offers *Professional Guidance* to support members in the application of the *Standards of Practice*.

## 2. DEFINITIONS

In these Standards,

- 2.1 **"client"** means a recipient of professional services and includes:
  - 2.1.1 an individual and where applicable, a legal guardian or substitute decision-maker;
  - 2.1.2 a couple, family or other group; and
  - 2.1.3 a corporate entity or organization.
- 2.2 **"confidential information"** means information:
  - 2.2.1 that is revealed by a client to a psychologist and that relates to a client;  
or
  - 2.2.2 that is provided to the psychologist with the implied or expressed expectation of privacy.
- 2.3 **"opinion"** includes, but is not limited to, verbal or written statements, conclusions or recommendations about the competence, character, emotional, educational, cognitive, physical or mental health of another person;
- 2.4 **"practice"** means the practice of psychology as defined in section 3 of Schedule 22 of the HPA;
- 2.5 **"provisional psychologist"** means a person who is a regulated member of the College on the provisional register;

- 2.6 **“professional relationship”** means an interaction between a psychologist and a client for the purpose of the psychologist providing a professional service;
- 2.7 **“professional service”** means a service that comes within the practice of psychology;
- 2.8 **“psychologist”** means for the purposes of these *Standards of Practice*, any regulated member of the College, including regulated members on the general register, the courtesy register or the provisional register;
- 2.9 **“regulated member”** means a person who is registered as a member under section 33(1)(a) of the HPA;
- 2.10 **“retainer monies”** means monies that are requested or received from, or on behalf of, a client to be used in whole or in part for payment for professional services yet to be provided;
- 2.11 **“supervisee”** means a person who provides services under the authority of a psychologist and includes, but is not limited to, assistants, employees, provisional psychologists, students and individuals providing services under section 13 of the *Psychologists Profession Regulation*.

### 3. INFORMED CONSENT FOR SERVICES

- 3.1 A psychologist shall obtain informed consent from the client and/or guardian before providing a professional service, including research, and before seeking formal consultation regarding a client.
- 3.2 A psychologist shall document the discussion held with a client, including whether consent was limited or refused.
- 3.3 A psychologist shall obtain written signed consent from a client and/or guardian when requesting the client’s participation in research.
- 3.4 A psychologist shall provide information for informed consent in a language that the client can understand and ensure that the information is understood by the client; this may include the provision of translation into another language, if necessary.
- 3.5 The informed consent process shall address the following:
- 3.5.1 purpose and nature of the activity;
  - 3.5.2 mutual responsibilities;
  - 3.5.3 confidentiality protections and limitations;
  - 3.5.4 likely benefits and risks;

- 3.5.5 alternatives;
- 3.5.6 likely consequences on non-action;
- 3.5.7 option to refuse or withdraw at any time, without prejudice;
- 3.5.8 period of time covered by the consent; and
- 3.5.9 how to rescind consent, if a decision to rescind consent is made.

***Providing New Information***

- 3.6 A psychologist shall, in a timely manner, provide new information to a client when such information becomes available and is significant enough that it could reasonably be seen as relevant to the original or ongoing informed consent.
- 3.7 In addition to obtaining informed consent from a guardian or substitute decision maker, a psychologist shall also provide an appropriate explanation to the client, seek the client's assent, and consider the client's preferences and best interests before providing professional service to the client.

***Providing Services Without Informed Consent***

- 3.8 Notwithstanding section 3.1, a psychologist may provide a professional service without informed consent in the case of an emergency, but only to the extent necessary to reduce or alleviate the emergency; further professional services shall only be provided by the psychologist with informed consent from the client.

## **4. INFORMED CONSENT FOR RELEASE OF INFORMATION**

- 4.1 A psychologist shall obtain informed, written, signed and dated consent from a client for the release of confidential information. The consent shall stipulate the information to be released, the recipient and the period of time covered by the consent, as outlined in section 12.3.

## **5. COMPETENCE**

***Limits on Practice***

- 5.1 A psychologist shall not provide a professional service or supervision unless the psychologist is competent through education, training or experience to provide that professional service.

***Maintaining Competence***

- 5.2 A psychologist shall maintain competence to ensure that the professional services provided conform to current professional standards.

***Adding New Services and Techniques***

- 5.3 A psychologist, when developing competency in a professional service that is new to the psychologist, shall engage in ongoing consultation with a psychologist or

other professional who has expertise in that area and shall seek appropriate education, training, and supervision in the new area.

***Impaired Judgment***

- 5.4 A psychologist shall not undertake or continue a professional relationship with a client when the psychologist knows, or should know, that the psychologist's judgment is impaired due to mental, cognitive, emotional or physiological conditions or as a result of substance or chemical abuse or dependence.
- 5.5 If a condition referred to in section 5.4 develops after a professional relationship has been initiated, a psychologist shall obtain professional assistance and determine whether the psychologist should limit, suspend or terminate the professional relationship or contact the College for professional guidance.
- 5.6 If it is necessary to limit, suspend or terminate the professional relationship, the psychologist shall do so in an appropriate manner by notifying the client, assisting the client in obtaining services from a suitable professional or contacting the College for professional guidance.

## **6. PROVISION OF SUPPORTABLE SERVICES**

- 6.1 A psychologist shall provide only supportable professional services; a supportable professional service refers to a service based upon the client's needs and relevant issues and is in accordance with reasonable and generally accepted common practice and/or theoretical and scientific knowledge base of the discipline.
- 6.2 A psychologist shall provide a professional service within a professional relationship except when providing general educational information, teaching and conducting research.

***Sufficient Professional Knowledge***

- 6.3 A psychologist rendering an opinion about a person that has, or could have, implications for that person's rights or personal interests shall not do so without having direct and substantial professional contact with that person, including an informed consent process and formal or general assessment.
- 6.4 A psychologist rendering an opinion or making a statement about a parent or guardian that has, or could have, implications for the parent or guardian's rights or personal interests shall not do so without having direct and substantial professional contact, including an informed consent process and formal or general assessment of the person who is the subject of the opinion or statement being made.

***Opinions on Reports Provided by Others***

- 6.5 Notwithstanding sections 6.3 and 6.4, a psychologist may render a professional opinion based on reports or information provided by other professionals, as long as the basis of the opinion and limitations are clearly stated by the psychologist as part of the opinion.

- 6.6 In stating a professional opinion, a psychologist shall note limitations regarding inferences made by the psychologist in forming the opinion.
- 6.7 A psychologist shall base an opinion on, and limit an opinion to, reasonable and generally accepted practice standards and theoretical and scientific knowledge base of the discipline.

***Referral***

- 6.8 A psychologist shall make or recommend referrals to other professional, technical or administrative resources when the presenting concerns are beyond the competence of the psychologist or when the referral is in accordance with the best interest of the client.

## **7. MAINTENANCE AND RETENTION OF RECORDS**

***Maintaining Client Records***

- 7.1 A psychologist rendering professional service to a client or billing a third party for professional services shall maintain written, legible, professional records that include the following:
- 7.1.1 appropriate identifying information;
  - 7.1.2 presenting problem and/or purpose of the professional service;
  - 7.1.3 fee arrangement;
  - 7.1.4 date and substance of each professional service, including relevant information on issues discussed, results of assessments or interventions provided, and observations made by the psychologist;<sup>1</sup>
  - 7.1.5 informed consent;
  - 7.1.6 issues related to termination;
  - 7.1.7 test results or other evaluative results obtained and basic test data from which the results were derived;
  - 7.1.8 results of formal consultations;
  - 7.1.9 sufficient information to allow for the continuation of care by another psychologist or healthcare professional; and
  - 7.1.10 copies of correspondence and reports prepared and received.

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<sup>1</sup> Editorial revision May 24, 2014

***Retaining Client Records***

- 7.2 A psychologist shall store and dispose of written, electronic and other records in accordance with applicable legislation in a manner that ensures confidentiality of information received by the psychologist.
- 7.3 When the client is a minor, a psychologist shall retain the client's record for a period of two (2) years after the date the client reaches the age of majority or ten (10) years after the last date on which a professional service was provided, whichever is longer.
- 7.4 When the client is an adult, a psychologist shall retain the client's record for a period of not less than ten (10) years after the last date on which a professional service was provided.
- 7.5 A psychologist who works in a group practice must determine custodianship of records in order that custodianship will be clear to all parties and clients will know how to access their records if the psychologist leaves the practice.

***Electronic Records***

- 7.6 A psychologist who uses an electronic client record shall ensure that the electronic record has safeguards that protect the security and confidentiality of information including, but not limited to, the following:
- 7.6.1 only authorized users can access identifiable information;
  - 7.6.2 appropriate password and encryption controls are used;
  - 7.6.3 users can be uniquely identified;
  - 7.6.4 users have documented access levels based on their role;
  - 7.6.5 audit logging is enabled and meets the requirements of applicable legislation;
  - 7.6.6 information is securely transmitted;
  - 7.6.7 data integrity is protected and secure back-up and access protocols are in place;
  - 7.6.8 users can be authenticated where electronic signatures are permitted;  
and
  - 7.6.9 electronic data is disposed of in a secure manner disallowing reconstruction.
- 7.7 If a psychologist places information into an electronic record that is not under the psychologist's direct custody and control, the psychologist shall have a written information management agreement that addresses section 7.6 and a written

information-sharing agreement that addresses access, secondary use and disclosure of client information.

- 7.8 A psychologist who works in a practice as described in section 7.7 shall abide by all requirements of the *Health Information Act* and meet all obligations regarding completion of client records, maintenance of record security and confidentiality of information.

***Correcting Factual Inaccuracies in Client Records***

- 7.9 A client shall have the right to request a correction of factual inaccuracies in the client's record; the psychologist shall review the request and:
- 7.9.1 correct the factual inaccuracies and, to the extent possible, notify parties who received the inaccurate information from the psychologist; or
  - 7.9.2 write an amending letter or attachment to the record and, to the extent possible, notify the parties who received the inaccurate information from the psychologist; or
  - 7.9.3 notify the client if the psychologist is not in agreement that there were factual inaccuracies or if the inaccuracies were trivial and correction would entail more effort than is justified by the error. In such cases, the psychologist will document the reasons for refusing to make the requested corrections;
  - 7.9.4 when the psychologist is unwilling to make the requested correction, the client may write a statement outlining reasons for disagreement and request that it be attached to the record.

## **8. CONTINUITY OF CARE**

- 8.1 A psychologist shall ensure that an appropriate professional is willing and available to deal with the needs of a client during an absence, planned or otherwise, from professional practice by the psychologist.
- 8.2 A psychologist shall have appropriate measures in place for client file access in the event of an absence.
- 8.3 A psychologist shall provide reasonable notice of practice closure or change of address to clients with whom there is an expectation of ongoing care.
- 8.4 A psychologist shall notify the College in writing of practice closure or change of address, telephone number and email within thirty (30) calendar days.
- 8.5 A psychologist who is practicing in a location where another psychologist had previously practiced must provide information to an inquiring member of the public that the previous psychologist's new contact information may be obtained from the



College and provide that member of the public with appropriate contact information for the College.

- 8.6 A psychologist shall continue to provide services until the expiration of a reasonable notice, allowing the client to access alternative services.

## **9. TERMINATION OF SERVICES**

- 9.1 A psychologist shall continue to offer or agree to provide a professional service to a client until:
- 9.1.1 it is reasonably clear to the psychologist or the client, or both, that the client is not benefiting from the services;
  - 9.1.2 the services are no longer required;
  - 9.1.3 the client can no longer afford to engage the professional services of the current psychologist and a responsible transfer to another professional or agency is appropriate;
  - 9.1.4 the client terminates the professional relationship;
  - 9.1.5 the client has had a reasonable opportunity to arrange for the professional service of another psychologist or suitable professional; or
  - 9.1.6 such time as a conflict of interest or a dual relationship arises.
- 9.2 Before terminating services, a psychologist shall give reasonable notice, provide reasonable assistance to access alternative services and be reasonably assured that termination will cause no harm to the client.

## **10. DUAL/MULTIPLE RELATIONSHIPS**

- 10.1 A psychologist shall not undertake or continue a professional service when the psychologist is aware, or should be aware, that the psychologist faces a potentially harmful conflict of interest which can include, but is not limited to, one or more of the following:
- 10.1.1 familial relationship;
  - 10.1.2 social relationship;
  - 10.1.3 emotional relationship;
  - 10.1.4 financial relationship;
  - 10.1.5 supervisory relationship;

- 10.1.6 political relationship;
- 10.1.7 administrative relationship; or
- 10.1.8 legal relationship;

with the client or a relevant person associated with or related to the client.

***Prohibited Relationships***

10.2 In relation to a person to whom the psychologist is providing a professional service or has, within the previous twenty-four (24) months provided a professional service, the psychologist is prohibited from:

- 10.2.1 engaging in sexually seductive and/or suggestive verbal or physical behaviour (such as, but not limited to, verbal and written statements, pictures, gestures);
- 10.2.2 engaging in sexual activities or sexual behaviour with the person; or
- 10.2.3 entering into a financial or other relationship with the person that is potentially exploitive of the person or that could reasonably be expected to compromise the professional relationship and/or the judgment of the psychologist.

10.3 When a former client could reasonably be expected to continue to be vulnerable to an exploitive influence by a psychologist beyond twenty-four (24) months after the last date of the provision of a professional service, the prohibition set out in sections 10.1 and 10.2 shall continue beyond the twenty-four (24) month period and continue for so long as the vulnerability exists.

***Bartering***

10.4 A psychologist shall not participate in bartering with a client or anyone related to the client.

***Potentially Harmful Conflict of Interest***

10.5 Notwithstanding section 10.1, a psychologist may continue a professional relationship with a client, although a potentially harmful conflict of interest may exist, in the following exceptional circumstances and until an appropriate transfer to another psychologist is feasible:

- 10.5.1 when appropriate professional services from another professional are not available, such as in small communities that are isolated and remote;
- 10.5.2 when specialized skills or services are required and are not otherwise available; or
- 10.5.3 in a situation involving a crisis or emergency.

- 10.6 A psychologist may continue to provide professional services in the circumstances described in section 10.1 if:
- 10.6.1 the client is informed of the current or potential conflicting relationship and its possible consequences;
  - 10.6.2 a description of the relationship is included in the psychologist's professional records along with a record of the discussion of the relationship with the client and the client's consent;
  - 10.6.3 consultations are carried out with at least two (2) other psychologists and documented, regarding the relationship and subsequent provision of professional services to the client; and
  - 10.6.4 withholding the service would be reasonably expected to be more harmful than providing it.

## 11. RELATIONSHIP WITH SUPERVISEES

### ***Providing Supervision***

- 11.1 A psychologist shall exercise appropriate supervision over a supervisee, as set forth in the Standards for Supervision, guidelines, ethical codes, rules and regulations of the College.
- 11.2 A regulated member shall comply with the Standards for Supervision.

### ***Delegating Professional Responsibility***

- 11.3 A psychologist shall not delegate professional responsibility including, but not limited to, a restricted activity to a person who does not have the competence to fulfill the professional responsibility.

## 12. PROTECTING CONFIDENTIALITY OF CLIENTS

- 12.1 A psychologist shall adhere to privacy legislation governing their practice.
- 12.2 A psychologist shall inform a client of the limits to confidentiality and shall safeguard the confidential information about the client obtained in the course of providing a professional service.

### ***Disclosing With Informed Written Consent***

- 12.3 Unless permitted or required by law or by these *Standards of Practice*, a psychologist shall disclose confidential information about a client to an individual other than the client only with the informed, written, signed and dated consent of the client. The consent shall stipulate the information to be released, the recipient and the period of time covered by the consent, as outlined in section 4.

***Disclosing Without Informed Written Consent***

- 12.4 A psychologist may disclose confidential information about a client without the informed written consent of the client when the psychologist has reasonable and probable grounds to believe that disclosure is necessary to prevent immediate and grave harm to:
- 12.4.1 the client;
  - 12.4.2 another person's mental or physical health or safety;
  - 12.4.3 public safety.
- 12.5 A psychologist may disclose confidential information about a client without the informed written consent of the client when permitted or required by law.
- 12.6 A psychologist disclosing confidential information pursuant to section 12.4 and 12.5 shall limit disclosure to persons who reasonably need to know and to the extent necessary in the circumstances.

***Services Involving More Than One Interested Party***

- 12.7 In a situation where more than one party has an interest in the professional services provided by a psychologist to a client, the psychologist shall, to the extent possible, clarify the limits of confidentiality to all parties prior to providing the professional service.

***Multiple Clients***

- 12.8 When a professional service is provided to more than one client (such as a family, a couple, a parent and child or a group), a psychologist shall, at the beginning of the professional relationship, address issues of confidentiality, disclosure and release of information. All clients must consent to the terms under which services will be provided.

***Clients Who Have Guardians***

- 12.9 When a professional service is provided to a minor or other person for whom a guardian exists or has been appointed, a psychologist shall, at the beginning of the professional relationship, clarify for the minor or other person and the guardian that the law may impose a limit on the minor's or other person's right to confidentiality.
- 12.10 Notwithstanding sections 12.8 and 12.9, if the minor or other person for whom a guardian exists or has been appointed and the guardian agrees in advance that certain issues are not to be disclosed to the guardian, a psychologist shall not provide the information relating to those issues to the guardian or another party unless required by law.

***Duty to Report***

- 12.11 A psychologist must follow mandatory reporting requirements under existing legislation.

***Limited Access to Client Records***

- 12.12 A psychologist shall ensure the confidentiality of the psychologist's professional records and shall ensure that persons working under the psychologist's authority comply with the requirement to keep information about a client confidential.

***Duty to Release Confidential Information***

- 12.13 The duty of a psychologist to maintain confidentiality under these *Standards* does not relieve the psychologist of the obligation to release confidential information in accordance with a court order or federal or provincial laws, rules or regulations. Court refers to a court or an administrative tribunal of competent jurisdiction.

***Release of Information to Clients***

- 12.14 When a psychologist has control of a client's file, the psychologist shall provide access to, and shall, within thirty (30) calendar days of a request, permit the reproduction and release of the personal information about a client to the client unless there is a significant likelihood that disclosure of the information would cause:

12.14.1 a substantial adverse effect or harm to the client's physical, mental or emotional health; or

12.14.2 harm to a third party.

- 12.15 When a psychologist provides access to, or reproduction and release of, personal information about a client to the client, the psychologist shall take necessary measures to ensure that no confidential information provided by a third party is disclosed without the consent of that third party if there is/was an implied or expressed expectation of confidentiality.

***Sharing Client Information Among Health Care Providers***

- 12.16 When rendering a professional service as part of a team or when interacting with other professionals concerning the welfare of a client, the psychologist shall inform the client that personal information about the client may be shared and obtain the client's consent before sharing information.

- 12.17 A psychologist shall take reasonable steps to ensure that all persons receiving the information are informed about the confidential nature of the information and the duty of confidentiality owed to the client pursuant to section 12.6.

***Disguising Personal Information***

- 12.18 When a professional report or other personal information is used as the basis of teaching, research or publication, a psychologist shall prevent disclosure of individually identifying information.

***Observing and Recording***

- 12.19 When diagnostic interviews or therapeutic sessions with a client are to be observed by a third party or recorded in a mechanical or electronic manner for audio or visual purposes, the client must provide informed written consent before the interview or session is held.

***Confidentiality After Termination of Professional Relationship***

- 12.20 After the professional relationship between a psychologist and a client has terminated, the psychologist shall continue to treat information regarding the client as confidential.

## **13. REPRESENTATION OF SERVICE**

***Misrepresenting Qualifications***

- 13.1 A psychologist shall not misrepresent, directly or by implication, the professional qualifications of the psychologist such as education, experience or areas of competence and shall, in a timely manner, correct misrepresentation of the psychologist's qualifications made by others.
- 13.2 A psychologist shall only use titles as authorized by the HPA and the *Psychologists Profession Regulation*.

***False or Misleading Information***

- 13.3 A psychologist shall not provide, or permit others to provide, false or misleading information concerning professional services offered by the psychologist.

***Prohibition Relating to Registration***

- 13.4 A psychologist shall not, by means of false, deceptive or fraudulent representation or declaration, either oral or written, attempt to obtain or cause the registration of another person as a psychologist.

***Aiding Unauthorized Practice***

- 13.5 A psychologist shall not knowingly aid or abet another person in misrepresenting that person's professional credentials or registration status under the HPA.

## **14. FEES AND STATEMENTS**

***Disclosing Cost of Services***

- 14.1 Prior to providing a professional service, a psychologist shall ensure that full information is provided to the client about financial arrangements, including fee structure, fees for missed appointments and bill collection procedures.
- 14.2 A psychologist who bills a client directly shall issue an itemized statement of account to the client.

***Retainer Fees***

- 14.3 A psychologist may request and receive money as a retainer from, or on behalf of a client, to be used in whole or in part for payment for a professional service yet to be provided.
- 14.4 Retainer monies received by a psychologist shall be deposited promptly at a bank or financial institution in a separate account which the psychologist shall use only for the deposit of retainer monies.

- 14.5 When a psychologist has accepted retainer monies, the psychologist may only withdraw funds for professional services provided as agreed upon and must, at the termination of the professional relationship, issue an itemized statement of account to the client.
- 14.6 A psychologist shall issue an interim statement of account at the request of the client.
- 14.7 At the termination of the professional relationship between the psychologist and the client, or within sixty (60) calendar days of the last date of the provision of a professional service to or on behalf of the client, whichever date occurs first, the psychologist shall return to the client or the person who provided the retainer the unused portion of the retainer monies.

## 15. COLLABORATIVE PRACTICE

- 15.1 Collaborative practice refers to practice in which healthcare professionals work cooperatively to provide client-centered care, often in multidisciplinary, interprofessional or team practice. When a psychologist works in collaboration with other healthcare providers in caring for a client or a group of clients, a psychologist shall:
  - 15.1.1 explain the psychologist's scope of practice, role and responsibilities to the client and the other healthcare providers;
  - 15.1.2 understand the scope of practice and roles of the other healthcare providers;
  - 15.1.3 clarify issues related to responsibility and accountability;
  - 15.1.4 communicate positively and effectively with the other healthcare providers;
  - 15.1.5 treat all healthcare providers with courtesy and respect;
  - 15.1.6 provide services focused on the values and needs of the client; and
  - 15.1.7 ensure that the psychologist's contribution to the client's care when working in a team setting is documented.

## 16. AWARENESS OF ILLEGAL PRACTICE

### ***Awareness of Violation***

- 16.1 In the event of awareness of an illegal practice or an apparent violation of these *Standards of Practice*, a psychologist who knows or reasonably suspects that another psychologist is engaging in an illegal practice or is failing to comply with the *Standards of Practice*, the *Psychologists Profession Regulation*, the HPA or

other legislation shall take appropriate action, commensurate with the issue at hand, including, if necessary, formal reporting to the College or other organizations to address or remedy the practice or violation. Such actions must be undertaken within the bounds of confidentiality and respect for the client, each other and the profession.

## 17. GENERAL

### ***Fulfilling Terms of Agreement***

- 17.1 A psychologist shall fulfill the terms of an agreement with a client and shall produce required reports in a timely manner.

### ***Limitations Affecting Assessment or Opinion***

- 17.2 A psychologist shall include in the explanation of results of an assessment, or the provision of opinion, circumstances that limit the validity, reliability or interpretation of the results.

### ***Responding to the College of Alberta Psychologists***

- 17.3 Within thirty (30) calendar days of receiving a written inquiry or request from the College, a psychologist shall provide a detailed written response including all relevant documentation and information.

### ***Adhering to Restrictions Imposed by the College of Alberta Psychologists***

- 17.4 A psychologist shall adhere to restrictions regarding their practice imposed by the College and report violations of these restrictions to the College.

### ***Adhering to Legislation***

- 17.5 A psychologist shall abide by the *Standards of Practice, Canadian Code of Ethics for Psychologists* and applicable legislation.